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->From the Editor’s Keyboard "Saying it like it is!"
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I just want to take this opportunity to let our UK readers know that we send our best regards on the birth of the new Royal Prince! We don’t often get an opportunity to mention our British friends, but it’s nice to be able to offer some congratulations across the pond on this joyous occasion. Cheers!

Until next time...

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->In This Week’s Gaming Section - Activision To Spread Its Wings!
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->A-ONE’s Game Console Industry News - The Latest Gaming News!
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Activision To Spread Its Wings after Vivendi Sale

Activision Blizzard Inc’s CEO, who is shelling out $50 million of his own money in an $8.2 billion deal to buy back most of Vivendi’s stake, said the world’s largest video game publisher will be freer to pursue acquisitions and grow after emerging from its French parent’s wing.

Bobby Kotick, one of the highest-paid and longest-running corporate chief executives in an industry that has been ravaged in recent years by the rise of casual and mobile gaming, told investors on a Friday conference call he thinks the company will be stronger as a result of the deal.

Activision shares surged 15 percent to $17.45, the highest since September 2008, in afternoon trading on Nasdaq.

As an independent company, Activision will have "the focus and flexibility to drive long-term shareholder value," Kotick said. "The importance of this transaction is that it gives us the opportunity to really reward our public shareholders and you see that in the accretion."

Vivendi agreed on Friday to sell most of its stake in the publisher of the blockbuster "Call of Duty" franchise for $8.2 billion, paving the way for a broader split of the French conglomerate’s media and telecoms assets.

The deal, which will reduce the French firm’s stake to 12 percent from 61 percent, fulfills Kotick’s longstanding wish to buy back the company he had built into a games powerhouse since 1991. Activision merged with Vivendi’s games division in 2007.

But the industry is struggling with shrinking demand for videogames as gamers shift away from traditional console titles to mobile games and free-to-play offerings online.

Vivendi is selling the shares in Activision, also known for its "Skylanders" title, for $13.60 each, a 10 percent discount to Thursday’s closing price. Analysts said, however, the deal was positive for the company because it removed longstanding uncertainty around how Vivendi would deal with its U.S. unit.

There’s no longer "this overhang that this struggling parent company is going to use Activision and its resources to its own benefit to the detriment of Activision’s shareholders," R.W. Baird analyst Colin Sebastian said. "That makes the shares worth more."

An investor group led by Kotick and Co-Chairman Brian Kelly will separately purchase about 172 million Activision shares from Vivendi for $2.34 billion.

The other investors include Davis Advisors, Leonard Green & Partners, Chinese web portal Tencent, and investment fund Fidelity Investments, which will end up owning 24.9 percent of Activision. Tencent, which also offers online games, will be a passive investor and will not have a board seat in the independent company, Kotick said.

Kotick and Kelly will personally invest $50 million each. The CEO received total compensation of $64.9 million last year, making him one of the top-paid U.S. CEOs. He has been a director and CEO of Activision since February 1991.

Activision itself is funding the deal with $1.2 billion in cash and $4.75 billion by raising new debt, Chief Financial Officer Dennis Durkin told analysts. It will also establish a $250 million revolving credit facility, he added.

Kotick and Durkin did not provide details of the company’s plans after the deal is completed, which is expected at the end of September.

Bank of America Merrill Lynch and JPMorgan have agreed to finance the deal, the company said.

"You’ve got a transaction that occurred at a discount and you’ve got insider buying as well. So when you look at all of that, the combination

of it ends up being a positive one for existing shareholder," Ed Williams, an analyst at BMO Capital, said.

Zynga Folds on U.S. Gambling Bet, Shares Plummet

Zynga Inc will largely abandon its long-running efforts to build a real-money gaming business in the United States, a prospect investors once believed to be the struggling company’s sole lifeline.

The surprise announcement came as the company behind once-popular games such as "Farmville" and "Words with Friends" reported it lost 40 percent of its monthly active users in the second quarter, as it bleeds mobile gamers to aggressive rivals.

Don Mattrick, the former Microsoft Corp Xbox boss who replaced founder Mark Pincus as chief executive this month, said the company needed to go back to basics, anticipating two to four quarters of volatility as it "resets" its business plan.

The company’s shares dived 14 percent to $3.02 in afterhours trading, or about 70 percent off its $10 IPO price.

"Zynga is making the focused choice not to pursue a license for real money gaming in the United States," the company said in a statement. "Zynga will continue to evaluate all of its priorities against the growing market opportunity in free, social gaming, including social casino offerings."

Zynga once promised investors that it could tap into a potentially lucrative new revenue stream by launching real-money casino games around the world. The effort kicked off this year in Britain, where such games are highly regulated.

But real-money gaming continues to be illegal in many U.S. states, despite signs state regulators will begin to permit games such as poker. Zynga, whose first game was an online version of poker, could wind up in a regulatory tangle for months, if not years.

Its withdrawal from the scene deals another blow to a company that has steadily lost the endorsement of Wall Street.

Zynga developers once flooded the market with dozens of titles from cooking games to bingo variations; its dealmakers splashed money around to snap up smaller rivals; and its managers opened studios in cities around the world. Its 2011 market debut was among the most anticipated of the year.

But in just the past year or two, its business model has crumbled as it increasingly lost online gamers to rivals more adept at designing for mobile devices or catering to a fickle, younger crowd.

Executives have pleaded for time to turn around the company, arguing to investors that greater fiscal discipline and execution would stabilize Zynga’s position, while a foray into casino-style, real-money gaming could pay off handsomely in the long run.

That thinking has changed in recent months within the upper echelons, with founder Mark Pincus and his successor opting for a return to Zynga’s

roots with free social games such as FarmVille, which catapulted the company to stardom in 2009.

"We need to get back to basics and take a longer term view on our products and business, develop more efficient processes and tighten up execution all across the company," Mattrick said in a statement.

On Thursday, Zynga reported quarterly results mostly in line or better than investors' already low expectations.

Zynga reported $231 million in quarterly revenue on Thursday, a 31 percent drop from a year ago, as the struggling game publisher continued to lose gamers.

The number of active monthly players dropped to 187 million this quarter from 306 million a year ago, its lowest since mid-2010. The company, which has acknowledged fundamental problems with its business model, went public in December 2011 at $10 a share.

Excluding certain items, Zynga posted a 1 cent per share loss, compared with a 1 cent profit a year ago. That was better than the 4 cent loss analysts expected, according to Thomson Reuters I/B/E/S.

Zynga reported $188 million in bookings, which is a measure of the value of virtual goods bought by players during the three-month period ending June 30. That is a 38 percent drop from $302 million a year earlier.

The company's stock was down to $3.02 after hours from a close of $3.50 on the Nasdaq.

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->A-ONE Gaming Online - Online Users Growl & Purr!
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Amiga Games, Inc. Announces Distribution Through Barnes & Noble's Nook Apps

Writers' Group Film Corp. and its wholly-owned subsidiary Amiga Games, Inc., a videogame publisher of classic games for a wide range of smartphones and mobile devices, today announced distribution for its library of titles through the Nook's multi-channel content distribution platform. Barnes & Noble Inc., the largest U.S. bookstore chain, launched the first version of the Nook e-reader in 2009 to secure a place in the fast growing e-books market. The Nook has sold 10 million units since its release and recent sales have rocketed after Barnes & Noble lowered the price to $129. The distribution arrangement will bring AGI's classic games library to Nook HD and HD+ tablets through the Nook Apps store for the winter holiday season.

Commenting on the new distribution arrangement, Writers' Group CEO Eric Mitchell said, "The addition of Barnes & Noble Nook Apps store distribution is geared toward developing new market segments and expanding Amiga Game's exposure to 25-49 year olds, which is the

largest demographics for Nook owners. Barnes & Noble's Nook tablet will help us to better introduce, and re-introduce, Amiga Games's classic titles to this demographic."

On July 8, 2013 Amiga Games Inc. announced that it had entered into an agreement to be acquired by Writers' Group Film Corp., a Los Angeles-based content distribution company.

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A-ONE's Headline News
The Latest in Computer Technology News
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

Homeland Security Official Probed

President Barack Obama's choice to be the No. 2 official at the Homeland Security Department is under investigation for his role in helping a company run by a brother of former Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton, The Associated Press has learned.

Alejandro Mayorkas, director of U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, is being investigated for his role in helping the company secure an international investor visa for a Chinese executive, according to congressional officials briefed on the investigation. The officials spoke on the condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to release details of the investigation.

Mayorkas was named by Homeland Security's Inspector General's Office as a target in an investigation involving the foreign investor program run by USCIS, according to an email sent to lawmakers late Monday.

In that email, the IG's office said, "At this point in our investigation, we do not have any findings of criminal misconduct." The email did not specify any criminal allegations it might be investigating.

White House press secretary Jay Carney referred questions to the inspector general's office, which said that the probe is in its preliminary stage and that it doesn't comment on the specifics of investigations.

The program, known as EB-5, allows foreigners to get visas if they invest $500,000 to $1 million in projects or businesses that create jobs for U.S. citizens. The amount of the investment required depends on the type of project. Investors who are approved for the program can become legal permanent residents after two years and can later be eligible to become citizens.

If Mayorkas were confirmed as Homeland Security's deputy secretary, he probably would run the department until a permanent replacement was approved to take over for departing Secretary Janet Napolitano.

The email to lawmakers said the primary complaint against Mayorkas was that he helped a financing company run by Anthony Rodham, a brother of Hillary

Rodham Clinton, to win approval for an investor visa, even after the application was denied and an appeal was rejected.

Mayorkas, a former U.S. attorney in California, previously came under criticism for his involvement in the commutation by President Bill Clinton of the prison sentence of the son of a Democratic Party donor. Another of Hillary Clinton's brothers, Hugh Rodham, had been hired by the donor to lobby for the commutation. Mayorkas told lawmakers during his 2009 confirmation hearing that "it was a mistake" to talk to the White House about the request.

Hillary Clinton, who stepped down as secretary of state on Feb. 1, is considered a possible contender for the Democratic presidential nomination in 2016.

According to the Inspector General's email, the investigation of the investor visa program also includes allegations that other USCIS Office of General Counsel officials obstructed an audit of the visa program by the Securities and Exchange Commission. The email did not name any specific official from the general counsel's office.

The email says investigators did not know whether Mayorkas was aware of the investigation. The FBI's Washington Field Office was told about the investigation in June after it inquired about Mayorkas as part of the White House background investigation for his nomination as deputy DHS secretary.

The FBI in Washington has been concerned about the investor visa program and the projects funded by foreign sources since at least March, according to emails obtained by The AP.

The bureau wanted details of all of the limited liability companies that had invested in the EB-5 visa program. Of particular concern, the FBI official wrote, was Chinese investment in projects, including the building of an FBI facility.

"Let's just say that we have a significant issue that my higher ups are really concerned about and this may be addressed way above my pay grade," an official wrote in one email. The FBI official's name was redacted in that email.

Iowa Sen. Charles Grassley, the ranking Republican on the Senate Judiciary Committee, sent the FBI a lengthy letter Tuesday asking for details of its review of the foreign investor visa program and Chinese investment in U.S. infrastructure projects.

Chinese investment in infrastructure projects has long been a concern of the U.S. government. In September, the Obama administration blocked a Chinese company from owning four wind farm projects in northern Oregon that were near a Navy base used to fly unmanned drones and electronic-warfare planes on training missions. And in October, the House Intelligence Committee warned that two leading Chinese technology firms, Huawei Technologies Ltd. and ZTE Corp., posed a major security threat to the U.S. Both firms have denied being influenced by the Chinese government.

The most routine users of the EB-5 program are Chinese investors. According to an undated, unclassified State Department report about the program obtained by the AP, the U.S. Consulate in Guangzhou, China, processed more investor visas in the 2011 fiscal year than any other

consulate or embassy. The document says "applicants are usually coached and prepped for their interviews, making it difficult to take at face value applicants' claims" about where their money comes from and whether they hold membership in the Chinese Communist Party. Party membership would make an applicant ineligible for the investor visa.

Anthony Rodham is president and CEO of Gulf Coast Funds Management LLC in McLean, Va. The firm is one of hundreds of "Regional Centers" that pool investments from foreign nationals looking to invest in U.S. businesses or industries as part of the foreign investor visa program.

There was no immediate response to an email sent to Gulf Coast requesting comment.

It is unclear from the IG's email why the investor visa application was denied. Visa requests can be denied for a number of reasons, including a circumstance where an applicant has a criminal background or is considered a threat to national security or public safety.

House Rejects Bid To Curb U.S. Spy Agency's Data-gathering Program

A U.S. spy program that sweeps up vast amounts of electronic communications survived a legislative challenge in the House of Representatives on Wednesday, the first move to curb the surveillance effort since a worker leaked details of its scope.

The House of Representatives voted 217-205 to defeat an amendment to the defense appropriations bill that would have limited the National Security Agency's ability to collect electronic information, including phone call records.

The measure, which has been opposed by the White House and intelligence chiefs, was the first attempt to curb NSA spying since former NSA contractor Edward Snowden leaked details about the extent of the agency's data collecting.

How Much Porn Does the U.K. Porn Ban Ban if Doesn't Just Ban Porn?

The U.K porn ban includes more than just porn, according to participating ISP providers that spoke with the Open Rights Group. In addition to the opt-in requirement for porn, ISPs will also automatically ban a slew of other content areas that have nothing to do with porn. TalkTalk, one of the ISPs praised by Prime Minister David Cameron for its "great leadership" in implementing the Homesafe program, has a screen like this, with all of those boxes checked. Note the inclusion of less porny site-types like social networking and dating.

Other services will have something similar, with "the precise pre-ticked options may vary from service to service," according to Open Rights Group. Since people generally stick with default options, the set-up encourages people to "sleepwalk into censorship," says the Open Rights Group.

To make matters worse TalkTalk's Homesafe is run by Huawei, the

controversial Chinese tech company with significant ties to the Chinese government. The partnership has some free-speech groups worried that all of the censorship decisions are going through a foreign government that also happens to have a penchant for suppressing free speech. Both Huawai and TalkTalk employees can decide what websites end up on the blacklists, a cause for concern. "It needs to be run by an organization accountable to a minister so it can be challenged in Parliament," Dr Martyn Thomas, chair of the IT policy panel at the Institution of Engineering and Technology, told the BBC.

Prime Minister Cameron has given the ISPs the option to choose who runs the program, and has promised monitoring to ensure that the filtering is done right. But, really, how will anyone know? "There's certainly a concern about the process of how a web address gets added to a blacklist who knows about it, and who has an opportunity to appeal against it," added Thomas.

Chinese Firm Huawei Controls Net Filter Praised by PM

The pornography filtering system praised by David Cameron is controlled by the controversial Chinese company Huawei, the BBC has learned.

UK-based employees at the firm are able to decide which sites TalkTalk's net filtering service blocks.

Politicians in both the UK and US have raised concerns about alleged close ties between Huawei and the Chinese government.

The company says the worries are without foundation and prejudiced.

On Monday the Prime Minister said TalkTalk had shown "great leadership" in setting up its system, Homesafe, which it has offered to customers since 2011.

TalkTalk told the BBC it was comfortable with its relationship with Huawei, and that the service was very popular.

Homesafe is a voluntary scheme which allows subscribers to select categories - including social media, gambling and pornography - that they want blocked.

Customers who do not want filtering still have their traffic routed through the system, but matches to Huawei's database are dismissed rather than acted upon.

Mr Cameron has demanded similar measures be adopted by all internet service providers (ISPs) in the UK, to "protect our children and their innocence".

He said ISPs would be monitored to ensure filtering was done correctly, but that they should choose their own preferred solution.

However, one expert insisted that private companies should not hold power over blacklists, and that the responsibility should lie with an independent group.

David Cameron: "In the balance between freedom and responsibility we have

neglected our responsibility to children"

"It needs to be run by an organisation accountable to a minister so it can be challenged in Parliament," Dr Martyn Thomas, chair of the IT policy panel at the Institution of Engineering and Technology, told the BBC.

"There’s certainly a concern about the process of how a web address gets added to a blacklist - who knows about it, and who has an opportunity to appeal against it," he added.

"You could easily imagine a commercial organisation finding itself on that blacklist wrongly, and where they actually lost a lot of web traffic completely silently and suffered commercial damage. The issue is who gets to choose who’s on that blocking list, and what accountability do they have?"

For almost a decade, Huawei has been a core part of telecoms infrastructure in the UK - its biggest client, BT, has routinely said it has no concerns about using the firm.

Huawei’s founder Ren Zhengfei, a former officer in China’s People’s Liberation Army, visited Downing Street last year after his company made a £1.3bn investment into its UK operations.

Prime Minister David Cameron has announced that UK internet service providers (ISPs) will be putting pornography filters on domestic internet connections.

The speech is the culmination of a long campaign by the government to get ISPs to impose default filters for adult and sensitive subjects. But what will the changes mean in practice?

But Huawei’s position was recently the subject of an Intelligence and Security Committee (ISC) report. It criticised the lack of ministerial oversight over the firm’s rapid expansion in the UK.

The committee said "the alleged links between Huawei and the Chinese State are concerning, as they generate suspicion as to whether Huawei’s intentions are strictly commercial or are more political" - but added that it had not found any evidence of wrongdoing.

It said it had worries that a UK-based testing centre set up to examine Huawei products was staffed by experts employed by the Chinese firm.

The ISC said Huawei was "effectively policing themselves".

In the US, intelligence committees have gone further, branding Huawei a threat to national security.

For its part, Huawei strongly denies having close ties with the Chinese government, pointing out it is 98.6% owned by its employees - with the remaining amount held by Mr Ren. It welcomed the ISC’s call for a review of the testing centre.

Huawei executive Chen Li Fang said the company should not be treated unfairly just because it was Chinese.

The UK government said it too agreed with the ISC’s call to review the testing centre, adding that it works with all major communications providers to ensure security.

"Our work with Huawei and their UK customers gives us confidence that the networks in the UK that use Huawei equipment are operated to a high standard of security and integrity," a spokesman said.

Policy enforcement

Web filtering, which is not considered critical national infrastructure, was not covered in the ISC's report.

But the logistics of how Mr Cameron's plans will be implemented have been the subject of much debate.

Initially, TalkTalk told the BBC that it was US security firm Symantec that was responsible for maintaining its blacklist, and that Huawei only provided the hardware, as previously reported.

However, Symantec said that while it had been in a joint venture with Huawei to run Homesafe in its early stages, it had not been involved for over a year.

TalkTalk later confirmed it is Huawei that monitors activity, checking requests against its blacklist of over 65 million web addresses, and denying access if there is a match.

The contents of this list are largely determined by an automated process, but both Huawei and TalkTalk employees are able to add or remove sites independently.

Illegal websites - including ones showing images of child abuse - are blocked for all customers with the help of a list maintained by the non-profit Internet Watch Foundation.

Mr Cameron said that the actions of ISPs would be monitored to ensure filtering is done correctly.

Communications regulator Ofcom is expected to play some role in this, possibly by auditing the firms and reporting back to ministers regularly.

Royal Baby Scams Could Lead to Royal Headaches

Whenever there's a big news story, scammers and cyberthieves are quick to take advantage of Internet users' curiosity in order to plant malware on their computers and steal sensitive personal information.

The baby boy born yesterday (July 22) to the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge aka Prince William and the former Kate Middleton is probably no exception.

So be very careful if you're Googling for news about the royal tot or for terms such as "royal baby photos" or "Princess Kate."

Online criminals carry out search engine poisoning to turn news-seekers into victims, using marketing techniques to boost phony links to supposedly exclusive items up to the top of Web search results.

But instead of being taken to real news or photos, victims often end up on corrupted or deliberately phony sites that can infect their computers.

Scammers do similar things with videos. Promises of "leaked" footage are common, but there's often a catch: You'll be asked to allow video-player "installers" or "updates" to be installed.

Instead of allowing a movie to play in your browser, the downloads could actually contain any number of nasty programs, including ransomware, spyware or other Trojans.

As of this writing, there are no legitimate images or videos of the infant prince on the Internet, so any links that purport to have them could be attempting to harm you.

Criminals also prey on celebrity news junkies in the form of phishing emails that promise "exclusive" information about a breaking story.

For example, the royal family has revealed the new prince's birth weight, but that's about all anybody knows so far. The public is clamoring to know the little guy's name, eye color and any other tiny detail.

Scammers feed off this hunger and may try to get the better of nosy news hounds by emailing to victims messages that claim to have links to secret details about the royal baby.

But the recipient will first have to take a survey, log in to Facebook (beware of fake login pages) or provide his name, address and credit-card number.

To avoid falling for attacks such as these, use good anti-virus software and pay attention where online links actually lead. (Don't click on any links in email messages you're not expecting.) If it looks suspicious, don't click on it.

Stick to major and trusted news sites. If anyone is going to have the latest scoop, it's probably not going to be confined to an obscure and fishy-looking website.

There are no reports of royal baby scams yet, but they're sure to come. Online criminals have had months to prepare for Kate and Will's big day.

"Sadly, it's almost inevitable," British security expert Graham Cluley wrote on Twitter about royal-baby scams. "It is going to be such a huge news story, the bad guys will jump on the bandwagon."

Ballmer Reportedly Admits Surface Was A Flop, Says Windows 8 Sales Are Disappointing

Although Microsoft CEO Steve Ballmer has always exuded unwavering confidence in public interviews, behind closed doors he s apparently being much more candid. The Verge reports that Microsoft held an in-house town hall event this week where Ballmer admitted to Microsoft employees that the company built a few more Surface RT tablets than we could sell, which might be an understatement given Microsoft s recent $900 million charge that some analysts claim translates to as many as 6 million unsold Surfaces piled up in warehouses.

Ballmer also admitted that the company is not selling as many Windows

devices as we want to and that it now plans to turn its focus to the back-to-school and holiday seasons to boost its sales figures. To that end, Microsoft has teamed with Best Buy to open in-store Windows Stores in more than 600 locations to raise awareness of Windows-based smartphones and tablets.

Finally, Ballmer told Microsoft employees that testing for a second-generation Surface RT was underway, although he didn t give any details for how it would be different from the original or when it might launch.

Google Offers To Fund Wireless Hotspots in San Francisco

Google Inc is offering $600,000 to set up free wireless Internet hotspots in 31 public spaces in San Francisco, but city officials said they need to review annual maintenance costs before it could be approved.

Google has previously funded public wireless projects in its home city of Mountain View, California, in New York Chelsea’s neighborhood and around Boston’s South Station. The search giant is based 30 miles away from San Francisco but employs hundreds of workers who commute from the city.

San Francisco officials say public Internet service is long overdue for a city that has eclipsed Silicon Valley as the epicenter of the startup ecosystem in recent years, attracting a dramatic influx of venture capital investment and young tech workers.

"There are cities not only here in the U.S. but in many, many foreign countries where free WiFi is ubiquitous. We have a lot of work to do," Supervisor Mark Farrell, who spearheaded the negotiations with Google, said by telephone Wednesday.

Mission Dolores Park, the weekend Mecca of San Francisco’s young tech crowd, would be among the areas covered by the plan, as would tourist destinations including Alamo Square as well as Washington Square in North Beach. Some less affluent areas such as the historic Portsmouth Square in Chinatown and the Tenderloin Recreation Center would also be included.

In a statement, Google executive Veronica Bell said the company hopes the free WiFi will be "a resource that the city and other local groups will be able to use in their efforts to bridge the digital divide and make their community stronger."

Because it controls so much of the Web, Google benefits from an increase in Internet use. The company reported $50 billion in revenue in 2012, mostly by selling ads targeting Internet traffic. According to a new study released this week, Google’s various properties account for a quarter of all U.S. Internet traffic.

The company said it would not own or manage the network. The angel investor Ron Conway, one of Mayor Ed Lee’s staunchest political allies, is coordinating the project through his non-profit SF.Citi.

Members of the local board of supervisors, who still have to formally approve the gift, said the project would undergo a normal review process to make sure that government contracts to install and maintain the service are properly awarded. In 2006, a similar plan to install wireless

coverage in San Francisco was scuttled after the deal came under political scrutiny. Officials also said they would review the details of the system’s maintenance costs.

In the case of New York City, the network in Chelsea cost $115,000 to build but $45,000 a year to maintain.

San Francisco parks director Phil Ginsburg called Google’s gift "no strings attached" and said the city could bear the maintenance costs. Google’s donation would cover two years’ worth of maintenance costs, which amount to $50,000, he said.

Ginsburg said officials picked 31 locations out of the city’s 200 public spaces based on a criteria of geographic and economic diversity. Some areas, including Golden Gate Park, were too big to cover with the sum donated by Google.

Installation of the equipment could begin as early as December and be completed by mid-2014, Farrell said.

Apache Launches Major Revision of OpenOffice Suite

In its first major revision in more than a year, the Apache OpenOffice suite now comes with a sidebar, from which users can launch their favorite tools.

"Over the years we saw the increased use of widescreen monitors, so we had to rethink how we used the user interface," said Rob Weir, of the Apache OpenOffice Project Management Committee.

The OpenOffice sidebar tackles the age-old problem of how to make a large number of its features easily available.

As desktop applications tend to accrue more and more features, the sheer number of feature controls can be problematic in that users may have to hunt around to find them, if they are not available. Or users could become overwhelmed by all the new options, if they are all displayed at once.

Microsoft confronted this problem when it replaced the standard menus in Microsoft Office 2007 with a rotating, context-sensitive ribbon interface, which would slide in the controls that would be most appropriate given the actions the user was currently taking, such as editing a text document.

Unlike Microsoft’s solution, which placed the ribbon on top of the document being edited, OpenOffice places the menu choices onto the right-hand side of the screen. The move takes advantage of the copious increase of horizontal working space brought about by larger screens and higher screen resolutions that have become the norm in the past few years.

Many applications just "added more and more toolbars at the top. You start with a menu bar, then add a toolbar then add another toolbar, and that wasn’t really a smart use of screen real estate," Weir said. "You want to have a document take up a good portrait space, and then you can have your additional user interface adornments on the side."

The code base for the sidebar actually came from IBM’s short-lived Lotus

Symphony office suite, which was a 2007 fork of OpenOffice that IBM contributed back to OpenOffice in 2012.

OpenOffice 4.0 is the first major update of the open-source office suite since the IBM code contribution -- OpenOffice 3.4 was released in May 2012.

The context-sensitive sidebar displays those controls that users deploy most frequently. "If you put your mouse on a table or an image or a text paragraph or a spreadsheet cell, you will get the panels in the sidebar appropriate for what you're editing," Weir said. "You don't have to remember what menu item you go to. The most appropriate tools for the context are immediately shown on the side panel."

Sets of controls are grouped into 22 different panels, which can be expanded or collapsed as needed. In addition to offering built-in panels, OpenOffice also allows third-party developers to add into the sidebar controls to their own extensions. ASF has set up a repository where users can peruse and download third-party extensions.

Other new features of OpenOffice 4.0 include additional improvements in rendering Microsoft Office documents accurately, a new color palette (also drawn from Lotus Symphony) and support for three additional languages - Greek, Portuguese and Tamil.

The nonprofit Apache Software Foundation (ASF) oversees nearly 150 open-source projects, including OpenOffice, the Hadoop data processing platform, the Cassandra NoSQL data store and the Apache Web server software.

More than 58 million copies of Apache OpenOffice 3.4 have been downloaded since its release in May 2012, according to the nonprofit organization.

Haswell-powered Retina MacBook Pro Might Mot Ship Until October

Apple s next-generation MacBook Pro with a Retina display may launch later than expected. According to a report from the China Times, a refreshed version of Apple s high-end MacBook won t ship until October. Earlier reports had claimed that the computer would arrive in mid-to-late September. The latest rumors suggest that the next-generation MacBook Pro with a Retina Display will be thinner and more powerful than the current model. The new notebook will also reportedly feature Intel Haswell processors that will improve battery life by 50% and a full HD FaceTime camera. Prices for the 13-inch and 15-inch models are expected to be in line with current-generation models.

How To Secure Your House Against 'Natural Hackers' Your Kids

Kids. Am I right? Always breaking stuff, touching stuff that shouldn't be touched, getting into stuff that shouldn't be gotten into. And always asking "why?" Why do you always ask "why," kids? Why!?

Apparently, one Microsoft security researcher has the answer: Children are "natural hackers."

"Children represent a unique challenge to the security and privacy considerations of the home," writes Microsoft researcher Stuart Schechter in a paper entitled "The User Is the Enemy, and (S)he Keeps Reaching for that Bright Shiny Power Button!" to be presented at the Symposium on Usable Privacy and Security (SOUPS) tomorrow in Newcastle, England.

But it’s not just about keeping children safe from potential hazards. Schechter points out that children s role in home security and privacy goes beyond that of hapless victim, as they often have a surprising knack for mischief of their own.

He even describes children as "adversaries," which might cause outrage or cheer depending on how you feel about children. But Schechter has a point, even if he is being a bit tongue-in-cheek about it.

 Children find innovative and potentially damaging applications for household objects ... They escape the household and assist in the escape of both pets and of objects intended for indoor-only use. Many children perform surveillance operations which are invasive to the privacy of parents, siblings, or other members of the household.

When you look at it that way, children can be a huge threat to home security, particularly their own. So Schechter has taken several traditional security approaches and adapted them for parents and children’s caregivers.

For example, as Schechter so succinctly points out, "children cannot be banished." Banning malignant or inappropriate users is often a first step that digital security providers take to protect a system. That doesn’t go over so well when the user in question is a kid with a knack for escaping the crib.

In fact, from a developmental perspective, a certain amount of rule-breaking is desirable in children. A home with perfect security one that prevented all inappropriate behavior or at least ensured that it was recorded so that the adversary could be held accountable could severely stunt children s moral and personal growth, Schechter wrote.

Schechter also addresses the question of parental surveillance. Adults often have an easier time accepting surveillance because they feel they have a choice in the matter, such as choosing to work for a company knowing that his or her work computer usage will be monitored.

"Children react differently to surveillance because the decision to monitor them is personal," Schechter points out. "Adding surveillance can breed distrust and cause adversarial behavior." To counter this, Schechter suggests that parents be open about their monitoring activities and try to record less personal data. He suggests, for example, tracking the location of cars and bicycles instead of children themselves, or recording the amount of TV watched and the maturity rating instead of recording specific programs.

[See also: The Spy Next Door: Private Surveillance Has Never Been Easier]

Of course, Schechter is being a bit tongue-in-cheek. But aside from trying to raise some eyebrows and draw a few laughs, Schechter is also doing something interesting: He’s framing the challenges of parenthood like a security problem.

The metaphor might not be perfect, but it works surprisingly well, especially when Schechter compares children to hackers:

"Children live in a world designed for people with stronger muscles, better motor skills, keener senses, better communications skills, and other essential abilities and knowledge. Survival and development require them to tinker with their world in order to learn about it. Indeed, much of what child psychologists call early learning would be calling hacking by technologists. Younger children have little to do with their time but hack and, as children grow, the ones who retain their hacking skills will be the more formidable adversaries."

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